

The Origin of Life

by SilentWiccan

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Summary: A Planet once dominated by Humans was once Glassed in 2531... And now, in 2556, one woman refuses to let it die. But is life really so simple to create? OC/Arb and minor MC/Cort. Prologue is slow, but it really picks up afterwards! please R and R!

1. Prologue

**A/N: So, I've been absent and busy with work, while dealing with relationship issues, financial issues... all that fun stuff of being an adult. That's not really an excuse to stop writing, but thats the truth. I'm sorry to those who were reading my freelancer fic. Ill try to post more. I've hit a bit of a writers block on that one...
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**But here's a new one, and its been prying my mind since ive gone through and played all the halo games again fairly recently, except for #2, as ive yet to lay my hands on a copy of it... anyways! here's a new story. It'll be sorta AUish, but not really. and only one main OC, maybe two more minor ones
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><p>Prologue: The Origin of Life

A planet consumed by war, rained upon with blood... Bodies that lay slain upon barren ground would return to the planet in the form of dust... Or perhaps the glassing would dissolve them first. Who would be the one to say? Not I, for sure. I'm just a simple scientist trying to salvage that which was lost to us in the war.

Life.

* * *

><p>April 22, 2556

Covenant gone, the Master Chief safely recovered, Sanghelli returned home, and then there was us. Humans are so weak were one to look from a genetic marking point of view. Yes, we've developed technology and mastered space flight. We've created life, and the ability to take it. We can create so much from the smallest, simplest things... And yet, war is the easiest.

I remember when the fire began to replace the rain, I was a child then, living within a military beneath the ground that stood high above the cliffs of Reach. My mother had died due to illness, which my father and brothers couldn't believe, while the rest of us enrolled in military when old enough.

I has served my five years by the end of the Great War, and settled back into my research involving new life. Reach and Harvest were glass... Earth was shattered, and broken, but slowly rebuilding. Perhaps something about the will of Man is true... Perhaps if I push forward, the planet will become the same.

* * *

><p>When a planet or celestial body first shows signs of life, those signs are usually some form of bacteria or virus. From there, such beings will grow to adapt to the surroundings, or not, leading to evolution or death... Harvest has laid bare for almost 25 years now... And I hope to begin my search there. I've no name for this project, but I hope to achieve one goal; to find a sign of new life, larger than any bacteria or virus.<p>

2. Chapter 1

**A/N: So yes, here's more of this story. I hope you like. It will be kinda serious in the beginning but will soften as it goes on. hopefully I can stick with this one for a while. And heads up for all you RvB fans, apparently season ten starts on the 28th of may. Don't take my word for it, just heard from someone who's met RT.

>

**And since i forgot the disclaimer, here it is.
>

I DO NOT own any characters related any video game, movie, book, tv show, and soon. I can dream, but it'll probably never happen unless I start making video games... which probably will also never happen. happy now? Good. I am too =3

EDIT**: had to fix some details here to improve the flow. There's been a slight change in how this begins, only so I can continue writing without feeling guilty! By doing this, I feel better :3 Very slight change... ._

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><p>Chapter One: The Origin Of Life
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****April 23, 2556****

"_Today's the day we set out from Earth. Myself, along with a small security detail of seasoned Marines are leaving for Harvest today. The journey will take 2 days through slipspace, and I am not willing to sacrifice any chance at losing time. _

I had employed the use of the UNSC's long-range scanners two days ago, and altered them to search for life signs of the faintest. I was in luck; a faint signal had come from Harvest, one of Earth's former colonies before the Covenant found it and laid waste to the planet. Then there was also the tale of Sergeant J. Forge, and his crew. The Planet of Harvest had been glassed though, and if I do find something here, even if it's the tiniest leaf, then I will know that there is hope to save at least one colony. Reach is lost to us for many years to come... Will Harvest be the same?

Beginning the journey,

Dr. Hayden MacMillan

* * *

><p>The pen's click as it hit the steel desk broke her from the trance that held her. For ten hours now, she and her crew had been flying through slipspace. Their destination was growing near, and she couldn't help but ponder what the life form would be. A plant, a small animal, and she'd be damned if it was just a bacterial cluster...<p>

Harvest wasn't usually warm by any means though, but the glassing had made most of the surface a desolate land. Snow covered a few patches here and there, while the rest remained as frozen dirt. The Marines claimed she was not in the right state of mind to be going to such a place, but Lord Hood saw the readings himself, and as he wanted to restore Earth to its former glory, granted the doctor leave for two weeks.

The Covenant, though disbanded, still lurked in the quadrant, which in turn riled up the Marines. They just wanted to get their hands back onto their guns and become trigger happy, which was perfectly understandable.

The ship itself had very little for entertainment, so the men slept on shifts, and the doctor kept to herself in her quarters. It was only another forty-two hours until Harvest had its first human visitors in years...

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><p>April 24, 2556

****Aboard the Stalwart-class frigate _Howling Winter_, Dr. MacMillan had loaded her gear into a warthog, and suited up in light winter gear. The ship remained in orbit above the half-glassed planet, and the group of five had taken a Pelican down to the surface, arriving at the Northern Poles of Harvest, her bio-scanners leading her to the Forerunner building in the vicinity. The Marines, on the other hand, just wanted some kind of action, though she reassured them that an encounter with some kind of enemy would be very unlikely.****

Yet, that didn't sate them. They were men of war, and blood of the enemy was their vice. In her quarters, she tied back her black, straight hair, tucking it under a wool touque that she pulled over her ears. Zipping her jacket up, a voice echoed over the PA system. Her security detail was ready to leave.

The Northern Region wasn't as cold as one would have expected, though the snow remained on the ground without any sign of melting sometime soon. Despite the area having been glassed, the planet itself was showing good signs of recovery. The atmosphere was still breathable without any strain or side effects, and the climate still lingered around what it used to.

Forerunner architecture was littered across the snowy valleys, though the pillars stretched a height that was truly formidable. As the team left their craft via an M831TT, the doctor riding as passenger, they drove through the valley, and she kept her hands firm on her scanner, hoping a blip would show itself. Armed only with a pistol, they all hoped that the trip would be quick.

Arriving at the Forerunner structure once called "The Relic", the three marines that had been riding on the back jumped off, hit a switch, and opened the elegantly carved blast door, a long, deep tunnel that lead into the mountains becoming their road. And yet, the doctor refused to allow them to drive through, demanding that they proceed on foot.

Once inside, they proceeded in caution, the men gripping their rifles with firm hands, and the Doctor proceeding without a care in the world. Her objective was all she wanted to reach. And that was when something caught her eye.

"Hey Doc, what's the hold up? Got a reading or something?" One Marine questioned, looking over her shoulder. The scanner seems off... It was showing movement other than their own. "Doc?"

"Shut up." She whispered, looking across the chasm they had stopped at. "Look over there, see if you notice anything... odd."

The man did as asked, using his binoculars to see across. Everything seemed in place, and the walls stood still. There were no shadows that were cast off of someone else. "Doc, I don't know what you're talking about, but there's nothing over there. Take a look for yourself. Maybe that tool of yours is just dysfunctional."

She stood at its monitor, nothing popping back up. A sigh, she crouched and checked the ground, running her fingers through the faint snow. "Maybe... Let's proceed then."

Continuing, they crossed a bridge made of what seemed to be highly condensed energy. And although the Marines may not have heard a sound, the Doctor was positive she could hear footsteps ahead of them. Her scanner still appeared silent though, contradicting her mind. Maybe it was dysfunctional and needed some kind of repair.

Progressing, a shadow moved across the floor, though nobody could be seen casting it. Her suspicions rose, and she placed her scanner into a pouch that rested within the left of her jacket, drawing the pistol

she had holstered on her right thigh. "Stay quiet..." She whispered to them. "Keep against the wall, at all times... There's someone else here." Crouching down a fair ways from the door, the Marines took point, rifles at the ready. The one in the lead peeked around the corner, only to have a small burst of green energy fly past his face.

"Covenant!" He screamed, unloading a full clip at a small group of Kig-Yar, Jackals, who backed off and jumped away. The other marines moved from the doorway forward, tracking as best they could. "What the fuck are they doing here? The fucking Covenant was supposed to have split!"

The Doctor raised her pistol and fired into the air. "Enough... I may not be a soldier anymore, but shouting at the top of your lungs isn't going to help..." She looked all around her, her scanner beeping gently. "A reading?" Taking the device back into her hands, it showed a faint reading, stationary, 100 meters ahead. She weighed the options, slipped the device back into her pocket and started to walk forward.

"Doc?"

Looking back at her men, she smiled. "I came here for a reason, and I'm not leaving without finding it. Sure, there may be enemy forces here, but that's why I brought you along. So we can go forward, or you can explain to Lord Hood why one of his top researches is dead." Her smirk only grew darker. "Are we clear?"

Grumbling with distaste, the Marines looked up at her and saluted. "Crystal, Ma'am."

3. Chapter 2

****A/N:****** Short chapter is short. The next one will hopefully and most definitely be longer than one and two tho, i swear to you. Chances are a lot of people are getting Nostalgia from Halo Wars, should some of you played it. I personally love HW because of the CGI that Ensemble does. :3 And yet, I assure you that this is an original story. ******

****Now it'll start to pick up... Why rush, right? Rushing makes for a shitty tale, as I've seen may inexperienced writers do, especially when it come to romance of any kind... relationships don't happen in a day, people! .**
>

****Also, I'm a beta reader now! :D if you need any help, lemme know! Enjoy!****

****Leave me reviews if you see anything you think I need to add or change or if you have an idea I might be able to slip in. I've got tonnes of material to work with here, but some reader input is ALWAYS welcome.**
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><p>EDIT*: Also, I went back through Halo Wars again and

realized I screwed up my years a little...Halo Wars took place in 2531, not whatever year I claimed... If i did claim... . Anyways, like i said, sorta AUish, but not really. Yes, I'm bringing some characters that died back to life... why? Because I needed them to be alive again... ;3
**

* * *

><p>Chapter Two: The Origin Of Life
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"We have to push forward, men. You see this?" She asked, showing them her device. "That is what we need to reach, and I'll be damned if we die here or go home with nothing." _She stared the five soldiers down, glaring at the pathway leading forward to the secondary chasm. Faint speckles of snow drifted between her and them, her gaze remaining solid. The men said nothing, and only gave a small nod.

Shouldering their weapons, one stepped ahead of the group. "If we push for this, we're gonna be compromised. We will have to fight our way through, Doc."

Giving a heavy sigh, her shoulders fell and she drew her pistol once more, reloading the clip after taking it out to examine it. "I know that... I don't want to spill blood, but I need to get to that life form. That's what will make or break the future of Harvest." Her gaze focused on the ice-covered ornate walls that surrounded them. "Are you really willing to sacrifice the life of a planet, of one of Earth's most productive agricultural producers?" Her voice rang heavy with desperation.

"No."

Pushing forward as silent as they could, they entered the room to the second chasm on the south side, their objective just beyond the north. Then, there was the issue of a swarm of Jackals and Brutes. They littered the north side, appearing to either be setting up a defensive line for an excavation, or because the scouts had told them that humans were approaching. Weapons being loaded and charged could be heard across the empty expanse. And then the sniper fire began.

Two men fell, blood seeping from the cracked skin the plasma beams had made against their temples, just in front of the ear.
"Sniper!"

And so the group of what was now 3 ran for cover behind the pillars, shots still being fired at the structure once used by Forerunners. A rumbling growl echoed, and the Jackals stayed their hands. They stood tall, armed with energy shields and beam rifles, careful to take aim. The Brutes behind them roared, and the Jackals once more fired, beginning to move closer, stepping foot on the bridge of light.

"Enough!" A voice roared, "The Humans are only here to distract us! We must hurry!" More growls and chatter among the group than was necessary was heard.

Hayden stared at the ground, her icy gaze shifting from side to side, pondering over what it was that the remainders of the once feared

Covenant could be looking for. Was it possible they had detected the life on Harvest too, that they wanted to claim the Planet as theirs? Or perhaps they had missed something all those years ago when it was first discovered by Professor Anders and Sergeant Forge. A voice rang in her ears, the screaming and shouting of the Marines that remained alive. Perhaps coming to Harvest hadn't been the greatest idea, but she needed this... Earth needed this. The voices grew louder with each moment.

"_Doc! Doc!" _Still hazy, the calling continued, her mind finally coherent enough to realize she was being called to. "Doctor! You have to run!" One Marine cried, taking cover behind a bole that acted as part of the bridge opening. "Go, run! You have to escape! They're advancing!"

Her eyes shot up in an instant, her mind finally taking into account what was really going on. He was right; she had to run if she was going to live. An army of Jackals was a slight worry, but Brutes? There was an almost certain chance of death awaiting that route. So she ran as fast as her feet would allow her, panting for air as the screams of two dying men behind her became her motivation. But even then, once the Brutes had realized a human female was trying to escape, and they had ordered a full on pursuit of her.

And as such, her heels carried her as they only could, but in her efforts of breaking into a full sprint, passing into the foyer of the structure, her toes caught ice and forced her to lose balance. Having fallen on ice and snow whilst catching her breath, she landing face first in the cold powder, her right ankle seared and pain, and her enemy had caught up to her.

So this is it? She thought to herself in cold silence. _ Am I really mean to die here? All my projects and research...all of it gone to waste, and for what? A dead planet...? A dead place that We will never be able to call home again? _

A roar was heard behind her, and the Jackals gave way to the Brutes, one particularly large Brute who carried a Gravity Hammer in his hands. "I will be one to finish her. The Humans remain tainted, poisoning the Holy Relics. For that alone, I will mark my face with your blood! The price will be paid!"

Rolling onto her side to look back at him, all she could do was glare. "What makes us so wrong, so filthy? You're the ones who spill blood over everything and taint the world! You have no riâ€œ"

She was silenced as he threw his weapon to ground, stomping the earth beneath her, shaking it with his might. "You will be silenced!"

Another roar echoed as a heavy foot came towards her skull, though pushed away by something. All she saw was a shimmer of a silvery metal, and several bodies, tall, with slender limbs. "Your words poison your surroundings, Tartarus. Let him up." And so the Chieftain stood, thought to be dead for four years, along with the Covenant. "I know not by which the means you live, but as you slander innocent life, my blade shall be the one to silence you, for good this time..."

Hayden's vision was covered with snow as she inched herself away from

the aliens. Injured, she was thankful for a surprise of the sort, but at the same time, wished to return home with the prize she came to claim. Was that too much for her to ask? Apparently so, but the shimmering figures that stood in front of her had issued a challenge. Blinking, she took a moment to focus on her saviours. They were Sangheili, Elites.

4. Chapter 3

****A/N:** So this one came out at just under 1800 words _ i feel proud for some reason... Anyways, The ending may seem weak, but its fuel for the other half of this fic. So deal with it, okies? . I love you guys for reading up to this far and sticking with it. And to my 3 reviewers, thank you for your words! I'll try not to disappoint you!
3**

****Also,** I'm Canadian... so i may switch between Canadian and American spelling of some words. . I try to be consistant, but FF[dot]net doesnt like my Canadian-ness .
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* * *

><p>April 28, 2556

_It's been one day since the encounter occurred, since I lost the men who were acting as my guards. We were surprised. There was no indication of Covenant forces having landed on Harvest. Looking back, we should have withdrawn and informed the UNSC; asking for reinforcements and a task force to wipe out the beasts. Bloody things, they are. And now, my ship is all that remains, its halls empty, and data scoured. _

Had They not arrived, I would be dead right now too. I suppose that I owe them thanks of some kind, but I'll need to think that one out. How does one express gratitude for having their life saved when confused about the exact details of said ordeal? I've got time, I believe, to work on that. However, there's still the matter of what I came to Harvest for. I still don't have the item in my possession.

Among this, I currently write this entry aboard the Shadow of Intent, lead by Sangheili "heroes" I never once thought I'd get the chance to meet and speak with. The Ship Master here has been so far welcoming, but as for his men, they are touchy, wary of me. Don't misunderstand. I am honestly thankful for the aid of the Elites. They fear me, it would seem... I am no different than any other Human, am I? Perhaps I'll inquire about this upon meeting with the Ship Master, and the Arbiter. He was supposedly somewhere on this cruiser as well...I look forward to our meeting.

If I earn their favour, I may be lucky enough to acquire their help in pushing the Brutes and their slaves out of the building and look around. Maybe, that is... If I want anything, I'll have to ask "honourably" for it...

No time like the present, I suppose, to attempt a mission like this. My meeting begins soon... I'll be sure to record the events relating to all of my questions left in this writing.

Introductions await...

Dr. Hayden MacMillan

* * *

><p>The cruiser remained stationary just outside of the planet's atmosphere. Lounging in orbit, the team that had encountered the Brutes returned to their masters via a Phantom, carrying aboard it a wounded Human. Ship Master Rtas 'Vadum seemed puzzled by her presence, but welcomed her aboard with open arms. They had circled the system for days, scrounging up what they could of the Forerunners technology. Sangheilos' military was strong, no doubt, but without technology, any species may be left behind.<p>

And so their travels brought them here. Separation from the Prophets' Covenant back in 2552 had cost them dearly, and now was the only chance to rebuild. And so they came to Harvest, looking to seek the Cartographer located within the ruins for answers as to where they should go.

"It has been Cycles since we have encountered Humans so far from their home. What is it that brings you here, to this dead world?" Rtas questioned, sitting atop his chair, Thel 'Vadam at his side.

She fondled with a pair of dog tags that dangled from her neck. "I seek something here, on one of our old colonies that could symbolize a rebirth of it. Five days ago, on Earth, we received the signal using some of the radar towers that still remain operational here, to an extent. Data we received showed that new life had begun to grow here, and I hope to discover what form it takes." She breathed outward, closing her eyes as she fixed her hair, forcing it to dangle against her back.

"And your name, Human?"

Hayden reopened her eyes to meet with the Ship Master's own. "Hayden MacMillan, chief science officer, bio-engineering and terraforming advisor and architect."

A low rumble erupted from the Elites that stood in the room. "Your title is long yet impressive. We have other business here, but tell me, are you healing well?"

She smirked, wiggling her ankle. "It was a sprain, not a break. Already healed." _For the most part... _ she heard her mind continue, still feeling a strain when she forced the joint too far. "Ship Master, Arbiter..." She paused, sighing with a smile. "Thank you..." The two Elites seemed puzzled at the sentiment, giving a questioning silence. "For saving me...protecting me from the Brutes."

"They shamed us and stole-" A hand now rested on Rtas' shoulder. The Arbiter moved forward, releasing his comrade.

"The Brutes forced us out, committed themselves to the murder of our brothers, and sentenced us to a death without honour." Thel began, his eyes locking at the monitors of the ship. "We were betrayed, slaughtered. We have no reason to show them mercy, for they showed us

none. We have reasoned with them, but none will listen. Whoever leads them now, leads blind."

"Arbiter..."

The Arbiter's head swung back towards the Ship Master and gave a quick nod. "We shall go. We have a mission here, just as you do, but know that we may not always be able to guard you."

Hayden bowed to them, thankful. "I was going to ask, but I had a faint feeling I'd be denied the opportunity. As for my life, I still owe you all. As for guarding me, I can still fight, I just don't do well when I have a swarm of Brutes and Jackals chasing me. I also mistook the fact that there was ice on the ground, despite the fact that I normally have good footing." She smiled to them, offering her hand to the Arbiter. "Thank you for this chance... When do we touch down?"

"Brother?" the Arbiter quipped towards Rtas, who peered at his left down to a navigator.

The Ship Master's voice echoed throughout the ship. "Brothers! Listen well! This is a time of strength for us all! The Arbiter shall lead the assault upon the Relic! May the Forerunners smile upon us as we crush their hides to dust, reclaiming what is meant to be kept pure! Launch will commence shortly. Be at your stations! Today, we fight with honour!"

* * *

><p>The surface was surprisingly colder than it had been the first day she had touched down to the planet's surface. Snow began falling from the hazy clouds above, and the sun failed to shine through. Hayden stood on the observation deck of the Elite cruiser, staring out across the scattered stars.<p>

"You should know that we found large pieces of metal as we arrived. I believe that may have been your ship. What was its name?" Hayden peeked over her shoulder to see the Arbiter standing behind her, bowing with a fist over his heart. "My Brothers are ready to set out against the Brutes, we only await your presence."

The woman turned to face him, bowing her head with closed eyes. Her arms circled around and held her torso. "I suppose we should get going then..." Her voice rang out, shaky. "And the ship's name? It was _Howling Winter._"

"Then I shall not tell you its fate."

* * *

><p>Three phantoms had left the hangar bay, returning to the surface with the Arbiter and Hayden in tow. Ghosts were dropping to the ground, the Wraiths following, as the third ship dropped the remaining party at the doors to the structure.<p>

The Arbiter led the Elites in, energy sword attached to his thigh, with plasma rifles in hand, to the entry way. Elites of various armour colors followed close, with Ghosts and Wraiths behind. He had ordered four Ultras to remain with Hayden, giving a command for them

to not enter for some time until which the threat of the enemy had dissipated. Rtas had given that order, refusing to let a human die by their hands to prevent tension between the two races.

And as such, the order was obeyed as the rest advanced. Something nagged at her mind though. Sangheili would die, and for what, she wondered. Why were they doing this for her?

"Human, they return. We will go forward, will you join?" One of the Elites asked her, the others advancing to rejoin their Brothers. Five Sangheili awaited them at the entrance, leading them to the Cartographer within. "Arbiter awaits us."

Hayden nodded, grabbing her scanner and pistol. As she followed them inside, blood remained spattered against the floors and wall. The Elites had cleaned the place well. There was only the odd body here and there as they passed through the chasm rooms and the central chamber, staring at the ancient device. Its energy had been depleted, even though tiny clicks and gears could be heard behind it. Hayden watched as the Arbiter stood before it, trying to use the remnants of a plasma reactor to spark it.

Her scanner chirped at her, and a small dot appeared 20 meters away, off to the east. Her eyes shifted from the Elites to the device, and back to the Elites. And that was when she started sprinting off in the direction, her footsteps echoing back to her saviors. Low growls reached her ears, and as they started to follow, the Arbiter held them back.

Her feet carried her closer with each step, the doorway to a small room on her left opening, welcoming her in. Yet, inside, the floor was covered with snow. Looking back to the small electronic device she carried in her hands, it showed that what she searched for was right in front of her.

"Don't tell me that this was all a glitch... Don't tell me that there's nothing here!" She cried, kneeling down and brushing as much of the snow away as she could before her hand started to burn cold. Her pants started to soak through, growing colder as she sat there, wondering why everything had played out the way it did. Covenant, faulty technology, dead of the people she knew, it all confused her.

A light breeze brushed past her, lifting a few stray strands of her hair and drawing her eyes back to the scanner. It still blinked, the signal staying strong. "Nothing can survive under packed snow..." She whispered to herself, scratching at it. The snow began to break, small chunks falling away as she touched the icy ground. She had reached the bottom, and her eyes lit. Encased in ice, a small bluish-green plant had started to grow. With a thin stem and only one leaf, it was only a sprout. It struck her as odd, but the first piece was complete.

"Is that your objective?" A low voice asked her, the shadow cast being long.

"Half of it..."

****A/N:** Whew... things are starting to lean toward the more romantic side side now, and I think I'm mostly done with the science... Don't take my scientific info as completely true though, ok? I only took my bio 20, not bio 30 or AP bio . . . and even then, its been... my god, three years now since i took that stuff... O.e time DOES fly by after school...
>

****Anyways,** I really do wanna know what you think about this story! I have 4 or 5 people with this story on alert, and I'd love to hear what you have to say. Not that I'm a review whore or anything, I just want to know people's opinions... Hell, send me a pm or something if you like. I try to respond when I can =)
>

****As for the ending of the last chapter,** I finished it at... 12:30-is last night i think... and i work today and tomorrow, and have a fucking doctors appointment friday... if that gets moved again, im telling them to go fuck themselves, and that if I wind up in the hospital again, then I wind up in the hospital again... . But hey, that means more time to write =D
>

****Enjoy!****

* * *

><p>April 30, 2556

_My readings weren't...off, but what I found was not what I had hoped. Even then, the prospects of my find still baffle me to a degree. How is it that a plant can survive in a snowy and cold environment? At least on Earth, this kind of thing makes sense. I suppose I should be happy though. All I need to do is collect various dirt samples, replicate the DNA strain of the plant, and see if new sprouts will grow. That's another issue in itself, and I'm afraid that I won't be able to collect the last samples. _

_The Elites have been very hospitable, and more. They've offered to take me home, and as I've no way back besides that. It has also been stated that I have no choice in the matter. I should ask about going to the old towns and cities here on Harvest before we leave. Four should just about do it, and then I can go on from there. I hope that this request doesn't trouble the Ship Master. I feel slightly unwanted as it is, and I hope to not trouble him and his people any more than I already have. _

_On another note, and a different topic, the Arbiter has become... closer. I would never have thought that Elites would be so fascinating, and yet, they are. He, too, seems interested in humans, and doesn't mind my presence. This may be because of his past alliance with Sierra-117 during the HC War, but at least one of them welcomes me. _

I should meet with the Ship Master and request what I must. I'm sure that they wish to leave soon, and I won't have another opportunity. My Research will be halted, and Harvest will never live in our hands...

All the peices are coming together now...

Dr. Hayden MacMillan

* * *

><p>"Ship Master, I know I've troubled you and the Elites, but I must ask one more favour of you!" She pleaded, the Supreme Commander not paying any attention. "It won't take long, I give you my word. Please, you must let me go down to the surface."<p>

"To what end?" He questioned, watching the stars. "I will not lose another one of my Brothers. We may have an alliance with your people, but these are my men, my Elites. And I would see them safely home. Their lives matter more to me than yours ever will, Human."

Hayden sighed, carrying a small pod in her hands. Inside, the ice-encased plant hovered, shimmering with the changing angles of light. "Understandable... Very well." She said, bowing her head and turning around on her heels, brushing past the Arbiter as she left and he entered the bridge.

The Arbiter's gaze followed her, noticing the dark, sullen expression on her face. Somehow, it troubled him, agitated his mind. Below the ornate armour that decorated his body, the veins rippled underneath his skin. "We make for Earth then?"

"We cannot linger any longer, Arbiter. We must return home, and so must she. You know this as well as I do, Brother." The Ship Master answered, telling his pilot to plot a course for the Humans' homeworld.

"Were it so easy, Brother..."

* * *

><p>Hayden had set her sprout on the ledge of the windows, watching the stars pass them by as the repulsor engines began to wind up. Her body felt heavy, and her arms cradled her own self once again. Her recovery from the surface seemed to glow in the pale light, her eyes holding the reflection of it. She ran her fingers through her hair and closed her eyes, turning around and leaning against the glass wall. "I did what I could..." She mumbled to herself, thinking about what the outcome would be.<p>

"Please forgive the Ship Master. We did indeed lose our brothers when fighting for the relic. It grieves his heart."

Her head jolted to the left to see the Arbiter standing there in plain sight. "How long have you been there?" Her voice wiggled out, shaky with surprise.

He took two steps towards her. "Long enough to see your sorrow. He means well, I assure you. You still have not given us your name, and I can understand why. But, I would find it a privilege if you would allow me to call you by something other than _Human_."

He saw a tiny spark of sincerity in his eyes, her hands reached for her frozen plant. "Do you have a name that you can give me, or are you only known as _Arbiter_ to even your people?"

The Arbiter thought for a moment on the matter, bowing his head to her. "My name is Thel 'Vadam, but I ask that you only call me by this when we are in solitude."

Hayden chuckled at the musing statement, thinking for a moment. Perhaps it would be a scar on his reclaimed honour for a Human to call him by his true name instead of the 'honoured' rank. Her eyes met with his once more and a smile crossed her face. "Call me Hayden then, at all times." She spoke, eyes trailing down his chest to where she saw an odd mark beneath his armour.

"The Mark of Shame. It was burned into me when I first became the Arbiter, only to delay my death. I will die as this, nothing more nothing less." He spoke quickly and quietly, taking her by the wrist and pulling her along. "I must show you something. Come."

And so he lead her through halls and corridors of the ship, Sangheili of all rank standing aside and bowing their heads to him as they passed by. She tried to reason with him, attempting to ask where he was taking her, but then they stopped. He had forced her into a small, circular room with a glass dome acting as the ceiling.

"This is the Anduli Nebula. My Ancestors once claimed it was the home of the Gods, and the Prophets deemed it as holy. Neither of these claims were true." He began, his eyes staring up at it without fault. "The Forerunners have built across all systems, and yet, none have ventured into the stars. My people wish and pray upon it for luck, hoping that what we ask will come to us. I bring you here to see this for one reason, and that is so you may place a hope among them." His gaze turned to her, her face and hair illuminated by the light given off and something within him was given a spark. A strange feeling to him, he paid no heed and went back to focusing on what the ship was passing by.

"And what should I hope for?" She asked him, not wanting to offend.

The Arbiter thought for a moment, seeing a light grow in her eyes. "Whatever it is that you seek, something you long dearly for."

The pod she carried grew warm in her hands, and her gaze shifted to it instead. Still glowing, it became to clear to her that it had a minor bio-luminescent property, and a smile crossed her face once more. "Alright then..." She said, closing her eyes and bowing her head, waiting a moment before looking up and back towards the stars. The ship had bypassed the nebula, and the Arbiter himself had bowed to the celestial being. "Thel?"

His head lifted upon his name being called, and her gaze stood solid, capturing his in return. "Did you send a hope?" She nodded to him, and he did the same. "I will take you to your quarters. We will arrive at Earth in three days, human time. You should rest."

"What will you do, Thel?"

He thought for a moment, taking time to consider her words. "I will stand by Rtas' side and do his will, but should you need me, please do not hesitate to ask for me. Please, come."

6. Chapter 5

A/N: **So This chapter has kind of a...distant context throughout it. I hope you guys don't mind. I personally like how I wrote it, especially the ending. Hope you guys do too. Lemme know what you think and review? Next chappie should be up in 3-5 days. No guarantees though!**

* * *

><p>Hayden combed her fingers through her hair, scratching her scalp gently. The Shadow of Intent had begun its flight, passing through the Epsilon Indi system. Escorted by two smaller cruisers, the Assault Carrier's staff bustled about. She felt restless, her chest rising and falling with heavy breaths. The plant she excavated rested on a small table, sitting still, while she sat down on what would be a bed to the Sangheili. It wasn't comfortable in the least, but she was thankful for being able to lay down. Back aching terribly, she stretched her limbs out and sighed, feeling that her neck was stiff. The past four days had finally started to take their toll on her. Hayden had officially grown tired of so much excitement.

The Arbiter's words to her upon leaving her in the room troubled her mind. Shocked at the thoughts, she realized that she felt...off. Being away from him troubled her to a degree; perhaps it was her feeling of personal security. The Elites had a certain frightening appeal to them, and she knew she wasn't well liked aboard the ship, despite Ship Master 'Vadum's order. The Arbiter was different though. His presence offered her a certain security that she hadn't felt in a long time.

Two knocks on the doorway brought her out of her trance, her eyes blinking a few times. "Enter." She called, the door phasing open and re-sealing behind her visitor. "Did you forget something?"

The Elite shook his head, taking two steps closer to her. "The Ship Master would request your presence on the bridge as we continue our journey to your home world. I hope this does not trouble you."

"Arbiter..." She whispered, an unknown smile crossing her face. "What's the occasion?"

He bowed his head to her with a fist over the left of his chest. "Even I do not know what he calls you for." As his words left his mouth, Hayden became a little flustered, and seeing this look on her face made his heart grow with concern. "Are you well? Your skin is becoming pale."

She shook her head, hiding the slight confusion her face showed. "I'm fine, Ar...Thel. Thank you."

* * *

><p>May 1, 2556, Earth, Sol System

"Sir, the UNSC stalwart-class frigate Howling Winter was destroyed three days ago, along with its crew. We have received no beacons from

the Doctor or any of her men. The last transmission was seven hours before we lost contact. From what we can tell, they were engaged by enemy forces." A female marine spoke, holding her data files in hand. "What do you suggest we do?"

Lord Hood's expression grew annoyed, disgruntled Marines standing at attention behind him. His initial judgement of the Doctor's mission proved truer than he had wished. "Dr. MacMillan has a bio tracer. Can you find the signal?"

"No sir. Her vitals went blank after the frigate was destroyed."

He thought for a moment. Scratching his chin with his right hand, his left resting against his back, a heavy sigh escaped his lungs. "We'll wait a few days, then send a team to investigate Harvest. If they are dead, they deserve a proper burial. Inform the Chief of what's happened. Send him a message. He and I have business to discuss."

The woman nodded to him, forwarding his command to another of lower rank than her. She thought nothing of the scientist, or of Harvest, but Lord Hood's word was the law. Harvest could be left to rot, and nothing would happen either way. And yet, the Chief was being brought into the matter. _What has this military come to..._ She asked herself, ashamed of her work.

* * *

><p>May 1, 2556, Epsilon-Indi Epsilon-Eridani system
border

_We are closer to Earth... Harvest is a fair ways behind us now, and we will pass by Reach soon, may the souls of those who died rest in peace. Unlike Harvest, Reach was completely glassed. No life was spared when the Covenant occupied it. It makes me think... Earth once was close to facing the same fate. How we escaped it... Why we were the ones to live... _

_My mind is rambling again. I really must learn to control it. It's unbecoming of a professional such as myself. And besides, I've got important research to do once we touch down at the surface and everyone is done questioning me about everything that's happened. I don't believe that the Elites will stay long... They've got their own matters to attend to, and I'm sure that they have research of their own to do revolving around the Cartographer that they activated.

—

_Concerning the Elites, Ship Master 'Vadum has had me attend the bridge for some time during each day. The reason as to why, I'm still unsure. Thel stays closer now, and again, I don't know why. Something appears to be troubling his mind. He's a tough one to get alone, and as such, I've made myself another challenge that I must accept. I intend to discover what he thinks, what troubles him. _

_However, I don't mind being surrounded by the Elites as much as I believed I would. Perhaps one day, our kinds may inhabit the same planet. We're not as different as many people think. Sure, the religious aspect and militant, along with the architectural aspects each have their differences, but we both have emotions, we eat, we sleep, we learn, and we fight. It just makes me wonder what would've

happened and how things would've been between our races if the Prophets and Covenant had never risen up and started oppressing various races and star systems. _

It's the second day here, by my time, of this journey... I long to be home... Soon, I suppose. Soon.

Dr. Hayden MacMillan

* * *

><p>Leaning against a navigator's console, Hayden let out a sigh. "Ship Master, why exactly is it that you want me here? I know your people aren't fond of me, but throwing me at them almost seems like an insult."<p>

Rtas chuckled, speaking in his native tongue to two of his pilots. "I simply want you to see something you will most likely never see again. It serves as a remind to us of how crazed the Prophets lies were. Someday, you and your people must face that reality, just as you are now."

She crossed her arms after pulling all of her hair over her left shoulder. A quick scoff was all it took to furrow her brow. "I do remember. I always will. I lost friends in the war, I saw our colonies obliterated... It serves as more of a painful reminder and a horrible memory than of a new reality." Her eyes trailed downwards. "I never again want to be drenched in the blood of another that was once called friend to us..."

He turned his head away, the shine of his armour changing angles. "Perhaps I have misunderstood your perspective. Would you care to tell me your story?"

Her eyes darted to his form, mouth opening a crack but no sound echoing through the room. Her body felt numb at the request, until a warm hand squeezed her shoulder. "Arbiter..." She whispered.

"We only wish to know so that we may understand." His voice called out to her, low as ever.

His touch soothed her nerves, her muscles relaxing beneath his grasp. "Is it really so important, Ship Master? I mean...why would you want to know about that?" Rtas stayed silent at the question, prompting her to begin. "Fine... I was on Reach early 2552, before the Covenant began their occupation. I was studying under Dr. Halsey, reading her notes from various military projects and such. When first word reached us of their presence, I was shipped back to Earth, as part of the reserve forces within the UNSC. I wasn't a true soldier, but I knew how to use a gun and how to act on the battlefield. I've killed and taken lives..."

"I was shipped off of Reach in the middle of August, just before the total occupation took place, and sent back to Earth, where I was told we would be safe from Covenant forces, even if it was only for a little while. There, I continued collecting data and observing the progress of the SPARTAN II's and III's, and reading over former terraforming files. An odd combination, I know, but it's what I learned; what was necessary for me to learn."

"And then, as the Covenant discovered Earth, attempting to what they had with our former colonies, I had picked up a gun once more, and defended my research. And now here I am, still collecting data and testing my hypothesis' concerning Harvest and its rebirth. I've killed, and I know I'll kill again." She stopped, taking a quick breath, her hair swinging over her shoulder. "And I guess that's my story, Ship Master."

Rtas and the Arbiter remained silent, taking in the details of her affair. She was indeed a well-informed person, even though a small pang of guilt flowed through both of their bodies.

"Ship Master, Arbiter, I'll be in my quarters." She said, turning on her heels and heading for the door. "What's done is done. Things are better now. I hold nothing against your people, you know."

* * *

><p>Laying back down on the bed-like construct, arms resting on her torso, Hayden closed her eyes and exhaled heavily. She was exhausted, despite having slept a great deal on the ship. Another day and a half, and then she would be back home, able to sleep in her own bed, take nice hot showers, and continue with her research.<p>

Tension was growing once more between her and the Elites. But they were the ones who asked; she was just following the order. She could see how stiff they were throughout the re-telling, and it made her heart heavy. "I have no right being here..." She mumbled.

"And yet you are trapped here, should you view it that way. There is no denying that fact, Hayden." She sat up, looking around her room to see a shimmer, the Arbiter revealing himself. "We have both lost dear friends. Rtas is wrong to take offense to the past events that have transpired. Please know that I carry no hate within me."

Thel's words relaxed her, and she let her head fall with a small smile. "What exactly am I to you, Thel?" She asked, still smiling to him. She allowed her legs to hang over the edge of the bed. "Do I hold some kind of importance to you?"

"Why do you ask this?" He questioned, perplexed at the fact.

"Because you always check up on me, you've told me that if I need anything to let you know, and here you are, coming to make me feel better about making you feel like shit. Pardon my assumptions, but it seems as though I've made an impression upon you, and in only 4 days time, to boot." She paused, brushing her hair back. "Thel... why be so kind to me?"

"I do so because I must. You are not my enemy, Hayden. You have given me no reason to think otherwise, and as Humans are weaker than us Sangheili, you must be protected. That is why I remain close to you."

The odd spark reignited itself within her chest, and her face began to fluster. His voice truly was soothing, and in that instant, she wanted to press her body against his and hold him. It didn't make sense. How could she feel some kind of attraction to a Sangheili, to someone of a different race?

"Thel... thank you."

7. Chapter 6

****A/N:** So, this is the longest chapter yet, though not by much... And I'm proud of it. Just a heads up, theirs a bit of alluding to same-sex relationships in this one, but nothing serious or highly sexual.. This fic is rated T for a reason, and will stay that way. Please enjoy, and let me know what you think! Leave a review or PM me!

>

* * *

><p>May 3, 2556, edge of the Sol System

_The Ship Master has pulled us out of slip space, and we're not far from Earth. It's a shame to say that I actually think I'm almost home. Despite longing for my own, nice, warm, and very comfy bed, I'll miss the Sangheili. My accommodations on _The Shadow of Intent_ have definitely not been the best I've ever had, and yet, this journey has been the most exciting._

Thel and _I _were_ talking last night, exchanging tidbits of information about our respective race and culture. As a race, their religion thrives around the history of the Forerunners, while their politics seem to come from military rank and social structure. Those who wield energy swords, or a blade of any kind, are aristocrats, high ranking members of the society, and are not allowed to marry, yet can mate with whomever they choose. Along with this, it seems that bisexuality is common among them. This does not surprise me in any way whatsoever. They call each other Brother, as a term of respect in honor, but in some cases, also endearment. The Ship Master, Rtas, and Arbiter Thel seem to express this kind of relationship and care for one another. I admire them... Perhaps someday, I'll find who I'm meant to stand beside, no matter what..._

However, at the end of this journey, chances are very likely that I'll never see or speak with these Elites ever again. That is, if the Covenant truly has dissolved.

_Speaking of the Covenant, if they haven't dissolved, why was their presence at the northern pole of Harvest so strong? Who would be leading them? The High Prophets Truth, Regret, and Mercy have all been killed. Tartarus of the Brutes, though intelligent for his kind, isn't smart enough, and the Jackals and Grunts are both submissive by nature. The logic behind the occurrence just isn't there. _

_Sigh... I suppose I should stop babbling and get down to business. The plant I extracted still lives, but it is beginning to wilt. The ice surrounding it finished melting three hours ago. I'll need to extract its DNA as soon as possible upon reaching Earth's surface, and my lab, before it dies completely. Even if I don't have the soil samples I need, I can still make some progress as to Harvest's rebirth. _

_...It's getting late, and I've a meeting with Lord Hood to prepare

for upon touchdown. There's no doubt in my mind that a very heated debriefing will end up taking place. And in knowing how he always seems to have a stick up his ass, pardon my saying, I'll most likely be reprimanded for something. Maybe, if I'm lucky enough, Sierra-117 will be present to mock me too, or even Dr. Catherine Halsey, the old bitchy bat. Come to think of it. The only reason I do look forward to returning to Earth IS my warm, comfy bed. If luck was on my side, I would continue to travel with the Sangheili, but that course of action isn't open to me at this time. If only I were so lucky..._

Time to face the truth, I suppose...

Dr. Hayden MacMillan

* * *

><p>Her eyes ached from watching the stars fly past. Red and bloodshot, she hadn't slept in over 28 hours. Ship Master Rtas 'Vadum had asked her to remain present on the bridge for a duration, and then was accompanied by other Elites to complete various tasks aboard the ship. The Arbiter Thel 'Vadam had begun to distance himself from her, forcing her eyes to wander towards him. He rarely stood near, and hadn't kept a protective hand over her since they had last spoken alone, and it was finally started to get to her.<p>

Annoyed, and finished her tasks aboard the bridge, Hayden retired to her quarters. Earth was only three hours away, and her journey would be over. She would be able to take a warm bath and relax, after a meeting with a furious Lord Hood and other dignitaries. Her mind had come to face the reality that even if she wanted to stay with the Elites, she wouldn't be able to. The fact that Thel had begun distancing himself from her only made such a statement true. He was mated to Rtas, and even if that assumption was wrong, she was Human, not Sangheili.

"Why must my mind torture me like that?" She mumbled to herself, sitting on the bed. "I'm a scientist, and I've got work to do on Earth... I need to stop kidding myself. That's all... Just gotta keep focused, and everything will be back to normal soon enough."

A shiver climbed up her spine and ended at her shoulders. The reality had hit her, but not in the way that she had hoped it would. She had to seek him out. The next three hours would most likely be her last chance.

* * *

><p>Thel was restless. Three years had gone by since he'd set foot on the Humans' homeworld. He knew not what to expect, but were he to meet with the Spartan once more, he would request that Rtas allow him to stay for at least one days' time. They had fought side by side, and forged a bond that only Brothers of the Battlefield knew. And a small part of him had to admit that he missed the Spartan's construct. She was very inquisitive for a construct, and her structure entertained his mind.<p>

Then there was Hayden to consider. They had grown close over the past few days, but she had grown too attached. There was no stopping their separation. Even as the Kaidon of the State of Vadam, and a made

"Ambassador to Earth," he couldn't linger there for too long. There were always matters that would need his attention at home.

And somehow, he felt as though he would miss her company. His sword wouldn't steel itself against such thoughts. Perhaps even if there was just one last conversation awaiting them, it would ease him.

* * *

><p>Hayden had searched the corridors and various halls from the Arbiter, with no luck of finding him so far. And as such, they had just made it past Neptune. Time was indeed running short. He wasn't on the bridge, the dining hall, the hangar bay, or his quarters. Only one room was left for her to search: the combat hall.<p>

She was told that Elites, new and old, would gather there to duel one another, and to sometimes participate in a chain of duels to prove who was strongest and would preserve their honor. Knowing what it was and how they used it wouldn't help her find it though. Thel had only shown her once.

Then, two elites exited a room behind her, both in full combat gear with weapon holstered on their thigh. She hesitated to ask them, and instead ventured inside.

The room was dim and bare, being a large empty space. Surely this wasn't the right room. Looking around, she toyed with her hair and spun around, looking to leave when a noise came from around the obstructed corner. A battle cry of sorts, and then the clash of two energy swords echoed in to her ears. Curious as to their origins, she peeked. The Arbiter and Ship Master had engaged in a duel.

Hayden moved closer, still keeping her distance from the fray. Her eyes followed both of them with vigor. Their movements were swift, despite their hulking appearance. Each dressed with only helmet, chest guard and leg guard, and sword in hand, they lunged at one another, each dodging the others' strikes with zest.

She sat, watching them close. Thel stood a fair bit taller than the Ship Master, but he was slower to a degree. She could hear them speak to each other in their native language, exchanging comments and criticism of their individual strikes.

Rtas' back remained to Hayden, Thel seeing her and her image reflecting in his eyes. "You know, Brother, that we have an observer."

"Let her watch." He mused, moving to strike low. "Perhaps it will entertain her human mind." Thel blocked on the right, side stepping as his blade connected with the shoulder guards of the Ship Master. "And here I thought that you had let your guard down because of her. You have grown too attached, perhaps?"

Thel dwelled on his Brother's words for a moment, disarming himself as an Elite from the Bridge had called him back to his post, stating that they had reached a belt of asteroids, and were needing guidance in bypassing them without damage.

"Seems I am needed elsewhere. We will not be long until your world, Human. I suggest you get ready to make your way home." The Ship

Master stated, bowing his head to Thel as he left.

Hayden's mouth opened to speak, but her words were caught in her throat. Her eyes had grown wide, earning her the Arbiter's concern once more.

"Are you well, Hayden?" He asked, observing that she had once again become flustered. "You seem... not like yourself. What bothers you?"

She sighed, bringing her arms around herself. "You've been avoiding me and I've been having trouble sleeping. Am I really the one in the wrong?" Her voice became a whisper. "Maybe I'm asking for too much, but..."

"Speak, please."

Looking up and forcing her eyes to meet hers, they began to water. "I'm not sure if I want to return home. I miss Earth, and her beauty, don't misunderstand me, but... Thel..." She stepped closer to him. "Can we duel? I mean, can you teach me to wield a sword like this? I'll most likely never have an opportunity like this again and..." She froze as he moved closer to her, holding out the hilt of his blade to her.

"Silence. Steel your mind as you would steel your blade. Ignite it." He told her, showing her how. Watching her look at it gave him an odd feeling, and when she was about to activate it, he stopped her. "Turn it around, unless you wish to lose your arm."

Hayden looked at it, and fixed how she was holding it. Looking to him for an approving nod, she activated it and held it firm, feeling the weightlessness. If one wasn't careful, she realized it was very possible for one to injure oneself.

"Now, strike at me in whatever manner you wish. I will not strike at you for the sake of you being defenseless. Begin, now." And so she charged at him, her footsteps clumsy and misplaced. Had the Arbiter not caught her in midfall, her landing would've been a rough one. "Your feet must carry your body, Hayden. Not the other way around. Interpret your opponent's movement, and step to it accordingly."

Once more, she stepped forward, moving in from her left and his right, sweeping the ground and striking high, her blade contacting his. She smiled, and earned a nod of accomplishment. "Better, right? Want me to try again?" Another nod was received, and she stepped back. Her gaze became blank, empty. And then, she moved fast, striking from the left and feinting to the right as she did so, eager to strike from the inside of her arms as she leapt backwards at him, he blocked and dodged, continuing to keep himself vigil as she began to strike recklessly, earning herself a minor wound to her own arm.

"And yet, you say that you have never once used this weapon, but are skilled with it." He noticed the blood staining her clothing as it began to trickle down her arm. "May I?" He asked, holding out his hand to her as he withdrew his sword. She nodded to him, holding the weapon out to her mentor as he took her arm into his hand. Examining it, her eyes watched him closely. "Many Sangheili wish to have such

skill as a beginning, but years of discipline are needed. A clumsy error, on your part. To shed one's own blood among my people is a loss of honour." He began to wrap the cut, applying pressure to it. "I will admit, however, that I am impressed, Hayden."

She sighed and felt limp. Her vision was clouded for an unknown reason. "Thel... I'll miss you once we part ways..." She whispered, falling against him. His arms slowly slid around her petite frame, in comparison to his. "Can I sleep, until we touch down? Or can I at least stay near you?"

Thel's gaze paled at the request. _I have gotten too close to her... She has become attached..._ His mind mumbled to him. "I would prefer if you rested."

"Stay near, then... Please."

He watched as her eyes closed. Still holding her, her breath began to linger on his chest. She had already fallen asleep in his arms. "Were it so easy Hayden, then perhaps I would not have to tear myself away from you, either."

* * *

><p>AN: So I hope I didn't make anyone cry... I warned some people that this chapter would be a little touchy feely... I personally am loving how this is turning out, seeing as how I'm literally writing this as my mind flows... leave a review? I'll update soon!**

8. Chapter 7

A/N:** Sorry about this one taking so long... lot of stuff happened in the timeframe in between chapter 6 and 7... including a trip to the hospital for me ^_^;; Don't worry, I'm fine... cant say the same for my organs though... and this one is kind of a filler... so please don't be mad!**

* * *

><p>Her mind stayed restless, even though her body felt weak. Images kept swirling around in her mind, none forming a clear picture. There was a tingling in her shoulder, a numbing feeling. Her head finally stirred as her limbs stretched out and her eyes fluttered open.<p>

"So you once more the light of day. Are you well, Hayden?" The low voice called out to her. "You have been asleep for some time now. Your Admiral awaits you, as does the Spartan."

Hayden rolled onto her side and inhaled deeply. Her right arm still tingled with a cooling effect, a small patch of gauze covering the cut she had inflicted upon herself during her duel with the Arbiter. "Thel..." She mumbled, pushing the thin blanket he had layed on her body off. Sitting up, she scratched the back of her head. She was in her quarters aboard the Sangheili carrier. "How long was I asleep?"

"Two hours since our duel. Are you well?"

She nodded to him, sliding off of the bed while crumpling the blanket up and tossing it aside. "I don't feel like I'm about to pass out on you again, if that's what you mean." She chuckled, smiling to him. "I'm sorry about that. It just...hit me."

He nodded to her, lifting the small preserved plant with his hand. "Your Admiral awaits you, as does the Spartan. Rtas has done his part, as have we all, but you must go, and so must we. Come Hayden... I will be joining you, as will Rtas. Please, join us in the hangar within one half hour. I shall return to escort you." He finished, bowing his head to her .

She sighed, nodding as she stood up and grabbed her lab coat from the corner of the room. "Thel..." Her words were becoming caught in her throat once again, and her knees were becoming weak again. She watched him leave, his steps more sombering than usual. Would their parting really be so hard on him?

She shook her head, grabbing her bag of gear, the plant held firmly in a small mesh outer pocket. The glow was growing faint, and the stem appeared to be shriveling up. A sigh escaped her lips and she sat back down. The more she thought on it, the more it began to ache.

* * *

><p>May 3, 2556, Sol System, Earth's Orbit

_And so, here we are once more; Earth. We've made our back here at last, and I find myself wanting more. I'm predicting that Lord Hood will be furious, in the least. And the plant is beginning to die fast. If I wait too long, it will die, probably by morning.

_

_Despite that, I do not want to leave the Sangheili. I've learned much here, about their customs and culture, weapons, religion... and their Honour. I'd hate having to leave. That being said, I know that Thel has a certain care for me. He's begun to falter in his steps. He doesn't want me to leave. _

_...Seems I'll have to cut this short... Thel has returned, and it's time for my departure. _

Dr. Hayden MacMillan

* * *

><p>The door to her quarters slid open, The Arbiter walking in. Hayden's eyes grew wide at his appearance. He was dressed in what she guessed was some sort of ceremonial garb. It appeared ancient on him, but looked right. He wore a black and red robe, trimmed in an ivory white and detailed with gold filament. He wore no armor, save for the guards on his hands, feet, and helmet.<p>

"Are you ready to meet with your Commanders?" He questioned, eyes meeting hers.

Hayden nodded, her mouth remaining closed as she picked her bag up. He turned, signalling for her to follow close. And so, she did just

that, smiling half-heartedly at him as she passed him by and into the halls. It was on their way that they met with Rtas, who was also wearing clothing different than his combat gear, and apart from his helmet. The two Sangheili greeted each other by shaking hands at the wrists, nodding to one another. Hayden kept her gaze downward, trying to avoid others seeing the hurt in her eyes.

Even once arriving at the Phantom, she still avoided eye contact from others, only wanting to return home.

* * *

><p>Fleet Admiral Lord Terrance Hood paced behind his desk. Wearing his standard white navy uniform, his eyes became mere slits in preparation of their arrival. His wrinkled face showed no sign of joyous anticipation. He grumbled to himself, staggering in his steps as a small party of Elites entered into the large room, with a single human among them. His head rose and his body turned to face them, face expressionless.

"I've been wondering when you'd finally come to speak with me, Dr. MacMillan. I hope that the Elites have treated you well in their travels to return you to us. Pardon my bluntness, doctor, but you've cost us a ship, and sentenced the lives of 200 men to death. Please explain what exactly went on down there." His eyes narrowed as his mouth closed.

Rtas and Thel moved right up behind her, feeling Hayden's whole body tense up at the accusation of killing 200 others. Gaze downwards, she inhaled deeply and began to speak. "After touching down on the Northern Pole of Harvest, we grabbed our gear and headed out. But, we had no idea... Nothing came up on radar, and our radio broke down on us shortly after. Then we encountered what seemed like Covenant forces, composed completely of Jackals, Grunts, and Brutes. And Lord Hood...you are right, their deaths are on my hands." Her face became dark as her body tensed up again. "I'm the one who led them in, the one who got them killed, the one who lived, and the one who may have possibly secured the future of Harvest. If there's anything else you'd like to accuse me of, besides murder, I'll be in my lab." She mumbled, turning around and storming her way out. Thel and Rtas looked at one another, Lord Hood's attention focused on them as the Master Chief entered the room and their conversation began.

* * *

><p>Hayden's hands rested against her forehead as she leaned forward. Her chair squeaked as she moved, waiting for the DNA extraction to complete itself. The gentle winding of the gears inside scratched her mind, the printer spitting out a record of species, age, medical uses, and the like. Sitting up and pushing herself away from the computer, she stood and ran her hands through her hair, pulling the mess back and tying it back. Her eyes ached, and when she looked at her reflection on a steel table, it seemed as if they were bloodshot.<p>

"This better work..." She mumbled to herself, leaning against the wall next to some white metal cupboards. "Gods be with me..."

"What Gods would those be, Doctor?" A low voice rumbled, a towering man standing in the doorway. "Last I checked, religion wasn't really

an open topic, especially among those who study some form of science. What's going on, Doc?"

Her eyes moved up to see a green-armoured SPARTAN standing in her lab, earning a groan. "Forget I said it. Can I help you, Chief?"

"Some of the Elites are staying for a week. Two of them seem rather fond of you and your research. Mind explaining why?" He questioned, his overbearing form casting too large of a shadow.

His words forced a chuckle from her as she dipped her head, Thel crossing into her mind. "They saved me, Chief. We talked, shared stories, and I learned some of their customs and how to fight in their style. It was an interesting meeting, Chief." She struggled to get the words out of her throat. "I was actually somewhat hesitant to return in the light of the moment because of how interesting their culture is. I wouldn't even mind seeing their planet, just to study the surface and vegetation."

Do you really believe what she's saying, John? Any of it? Cortana mused to him.

"We fought alongside them, Cortana. You don't have to be so harsh."

The female AI laughed inside her mind, watching the Doctor closely. Maybe they got a little too close? Soon as she left Lord Hood's office, the Arbiter's stance diminished a bit, and he even gave their ceremonial bow to her.

"Not like we wouldn't have done the same. It's only been three years, you know that as well as I do, but things change, Cortana, even the bonds of different species. If you think about it, you aren't even really alive."

About to speak, Cortana froze in her place and shut herself down, not wanting to hear another word after an insult such as that. "Forget I said anything then, John. My words don't matter and aren't even really there, since I'm not alive, you know?"

Chief sighed, nodding to Hayden. He took his leave of her, the sounds of the machines and brightness of the lab starting to bother his eyes. "Good luck Doc."

Hayden nodded her head towards him, returning to the computer as the first of her dna indexing completed itself. "Thanks Chief..." She whispered, heaving a heavy sigh. "I'll need it..."

* * *

><p>AN:**** Sorry that the ending was so weak... Needed to get over that hump, just to get a move on. I've started debating a sequel to this story in my mind... let me know if you think i should give it life?*

9. Chapter 8

**A/N: I know, I know... it's been a really long time since the last

update, and I'm really really sorry I havent posted anything in a really long time! Been super busy with work, relationship issues, being sick, financial issues, and all sorts of other things, but here it is! Chapter 8 at last! most likely, this will be the second-last chapter of this fic.

>

****Enjoy!**

>

****~Shadow****

*** * ***

><p>Head bobbing, limp limbs and extremities, steady breaths... It was the beeping of the alarm that she had set which had awoken her, though not without a few yawns. Hayden ran a hand through her hair, wiping her eyes after, seeing that it was 5:30 am. She had fallen asleep in her lab while waiting for the final results to appear on screen, and for the DNA extraction to be complete. Nobody had come in to disturb her or wake her.<p>

Hayden had realized that at this point, wheelie desk chairs were not the ideal thing to fall asleep on. When she craned her neck upwards and rolled it from side to side, her muscles ached and pulled at each other. Her shoulder blades began to do the same as she began to stretch her arms.

"No more staying up past three..." She mumbled, blinking as she rested back against the desk, hitting `_save_` and pushing herself away to stand and move over to the papers that had printed out. Taking them into her hands, her eyes ran back and forth over the data sprawled out on the pages. Everything seemed in order, and the preserved DNA was sitting secure in a small glass vial. "Hopefully this works..."

Setting the papers into a folder and into a cabinet, she took the vials into her hands, both cool to the touch. She would have to further tamper with them if she wanted to keep them stored safely for weeks, or even months. Lord Hood wouldn't be letting her leave the planet anytime soon, but the samples were needed.

Hayden yawned, stretching back as she did so. Her body and mind were still exhausted, and her bed still lay claim to her.

"You just wait here..." She told the samples, setting them into a rack that sat on a metal shelf in a small refrigerator-type room. "I'll be back." She said through another yawn, locking the door closed and setting the temperature to 3 degrees Celsius. It was time to actually sleep.

As she swung her body around and headed for the door, she rubbed her right eye to remove a tiny amount of crust that had formed in the corner, seeing Marines run past in order to reach their early morning exercises. Reaching it, and standing in the doorway, two of them who had fallen behind nearly bumped into her, apologizing and continuing along their way.

Hayden's feet continued to carry her down the halls and out of the research wing, now stepping through the doors of the offices.

Messengers ran around, carrying messages to various high ranking soldiers, one stopping her in her tracks.

"Dr MacMillan, Lord Hood wants to see you asap! Please, go see him."

Her eyes narrowed in the messenger's direction her feet freezing her in place. "And to what do I owe the occasion of his calling?" Her voice became dark and sarcastic. "I don't need to be reprimanded or court marshaled right now."

"No ma'am. He didn't say." The man became rather sheepish and started to back away. "Please, go see him in his office right away!" He called, running around a corner and leaving her to the mercy of secretaries and soldiers.

Watching him run as he did made her feel weak again. She was tired of being picked on by the Fleet Admiral. But was that term really the correct one? Hayden's mind wouldn't provide her with a formal answer, and instead, continued to confuse her.

* * *

><p>Approaching the office, murmurs escalating the closer her feet carried her. Low growls and languages unheard of for years scoured her ears, and as the door opened and she stepped inside, such topics became null. All eyes were on her.<p>

Hayden's gaze traveled the room, Human and Sangheili alike watching her close. "Seems I've interrupted something. Should I come back later?"

With eyes of supervisors, high-ranking officers, and guests to the planet on her, a shiver crept its way through her spine. Her legs suddenly felt weak and she wanted to fall. "Doctor, you've given us many years of excellent service, and are a survivor of the War. However, the council and myself have convened and have made the decision to pull you off of the Harvest Initiative. In addition to this, you have also been grounded from all interplanetary travel."

Hayden's eyes grew wide and her mouth cracked open, repeating his words over in her mind again and again to ensure that she had heard him correctly. "You're... pulling me off of Harvest?" She asked in a faint whisper, her nerves finally beginning to shake. "But... Lord Hood, you can't do this! I was the one who found the start of it all, I'm the one who set all of this into motion and carried it out! This is MY research! How dare you attempt to take this all away from me, after everything I've achieved!"

Lord Hood's eyelids fell and he walked around the back of his desk, now standing at the side. "We took this decision into careful consideration, and this was the best course of action, Hayden. Your latest actions have brought about a high risk factor."

She wanted to speak out against him, regain what was just taken, and yet, her vocal chords wouldn't let any kind of sound escape from them. Instead, she simply turned around, and headed for the door.

Thel, standing in silence with his kind off to the side, followed her with his eyes, earning the gaze of Rtas in return. Both knew what the other would do, even if it meant sacrificing the honor that had just been regained.

* * *

><p>She tossed her keycard and keys onto the shelf that sat against the wall connected to the door. Her quarters seemed dull now, everything tucked away tidily in its place. The rooms did, however, smell of cleaning chemicals, yet gave off a fresh scent not hard on her nose. Hayden could only sigh as she walked over to the bedroom and opened the closet, hanging up her white lab coat. She let her hair out of the bun she had pulled it up into and sat on the soft bed. Running her hand over the sheets, her mind began racing about the events that had transpired.<p>

"Everything I've worked for... Everything I've done, found, discovered, all stripped away in an instant..." She whispered to herself. "They'll probably just scrap it and wipe the slate clean... Maybe even discharge me, if I'm lucky."

"Were it so easy for them to simply toss you away as if you were refuse." A low voice rang out, heavy shadow taking form behind him, opposite the lights. "They keep you caged like an animal. I personally, do not approve of this."

"Thel." She exhaled, her head turning towards the direction of the door. "I am trapped here, now. Everything's gone, and I'm supposed to just sit here and wait like the good little girl that I once was. If anything, he's a useless sack of shit, pardon my language... Moronic, even." Her expression became an angry scowl, her forehead and cheeks wrinkling.

The Arbiter stepped inside, the door closing behind him. His robes, despite the lighting, and how dim it was, still seemed to glisten. "I mean no disrespect to you, Hayden. We take our leave tomorrow. Were it in my power, I would see that you travelled with us back to our world." He paused, his gaze meeting hers in consolation. "You would enjoy your time there, I believe. The land has much to offer, and as your kind has never stepped foot on its soil, there would be much for you to document and learn."

Hayden turned away from him and rolled onto her side for a moment, rolling back and sitting up to meet his eyes once more. She began to radiate desperation and fear, accompanied by a certain air of loneliness. "I do want to go with you... Hell, I don't want you to leave. But how, you have a job to do back home. You're the Arbiter, Thel, and â€œ"

"I am also Ambassador to Earth and Kaidon of the State of Vadam." He interjected.

"Exactly..." She replied, moving to the edge of her bed and standing, holding her hands out to his, and running her fingers over his, feeling the coolness of his body. "You can't stay, and I can't go with you. This is the last we'll see each other."

Thel breathed heavily, gripping her fingers with her own. He thought for a moment, remembering that Lord Hood hadn't stated anything about

his race 'conscripting' her, were that the correct term. In truth, he didn't want her to fade from his life. Sure, he was a seasoned veteran, and a politician, but he had seen many humans in his lifetime, both friend and foe. But none, had he ever had such an attachment to, let alone an astonishing amount of care. "Despite your Commander's word, come. Rest in the quarters we once gave you aboard our ship. There is a Phantom leaving for the vessel in one hour's time. Please come. It would improve the morale of my people, including Rtas."

Hayden's head fell. He was offering a chance to continue her work and be free from any restriction. But with such action came great consequence. Were she to just pack up and leave, Lord Hood would see it as taking a hostage or something of the like, which would initiate war once again. She knew she couldn't take that chance; she'd have to take a different approach. "I'll think about it."

Thel nodded and released her from his grasp, bowing his head to her. "If I do not see you once more, please take great care of yourself. Shall we return to Earth, it would lift my spirits to see your face again." He replied, taking his leave, and leaving her stand there without resolve.

10. Epilogue

**A/N: And so, here is the closer to this tale. No, not rushed. I actually had two days off from work, and not much else to do, and I was in the mood to write, so here is the Epilogue to _The Origin Of Life. _Keep your eyes open though. I may write a sequel! :D

>

* * *

><p>May 7, 2556

_My career as a terraformer, soldier, bio-engineer, and general researcher has met its end, I'm afraid. _

_During the war, I fought and survived. Human morality can be a non-existent force, when the only options are life and death. I was given the gift of life, while many died. I could've easily taken someone Else's place and be laying in a bed of dirt and glass. But here I am, leaving everything I once held dear. Earth has been my home since my mother gave birth to me; here I grew and learned, transformed into what I am now. I do not regret my choice in this matter in any way, shape, or form. _

_What does a person normally do what the thing they care most about is torn from them? Some grieve, trying to find closure and a way to cope. Some reject the reality and live a life of pure denial. Some earn depression, joy, courage, motivation... not me. I earned forgiveness. My research is not who I am, who I was, or who I will be. It was what my job was. I was meant to grow beyond my own boundaries, whatever I believe them to be. My experiences are what define who I am. And this is the path I choose to take. _

_Freedom was offered to me. The price for it was right. I have no regrets, and I made this choice of my own free will. Should you come

to look for me, chances are that you will find me. But know that I chose this on my own. I was not persuaded in any way, nor was I taken as a prisoner. _

_Lord Hood made the choice of removing me from my own projects, sold my data to the highest bidder, and tossed Harvest away to the dogs. Earth needs her colonies, and if that is no longer a priority, then I am no longer needed here. There are others who can do the same as I. I wish this planet, and her people well. _

I leave this here, To Whom It May Concern. Maybe there will at least be one person who can learn from my own mistakes.

Hayden MacMillan.

* * *

><p>"Dr. MacMillan? Dr MacMillan, you're late for the conference!" A soldier had called, banging on the door to her quarters. His hand kept flailing as he continued to call out, and eventually, it slid open to reveal a vacant room. Everything was tidy; bed was made, chair right up to the desk. However, there was no sign of any clothing that remained.<p>

His eyes scanned the standardized furniture, and one by one, the drawers to each piece flew open. There was nothing in the dresser, and the only other piece was a single drawer in her desk. Yet, something had caught his attention. There was a small notebook sitting open, words scribbled upon the two open-faced pages.

"My career as a terraformer, soldier, bioengineer, and general researcher has met its end, I'm afraid?" He read, his eyes growing wide. Snatching up the book, he made his way for Lord Hood's office.

End
file.